

Extension Watershed Stewardship

Ever-increasing urbanization coupled with the many impacts imposed by a growing population are challenging the integrity of Puget Sound-area watersheds. These impacts include reduced habitat quantity and quality for wildlife, degraded water quality in our streams and rivers, and reduced natural functioning of valuable landscape features such as groundwater recharge by wetlands. Agency personnel actions and regulations alone will not



solve these challenges; therefore, there is a need for **increased involvement by citizens in educating the community**. In an effort to meet this need, WSU King County Extension began the Watershed Stewardship (known then as Land/Water Stewardship) volunteer training program in 1990. This program is designed to educate, inspire, empower, and support citizens in their efforts to provide information and leadership in their communities to protect local watersheds.

Program Goals:

- Increase public awareness of the value of healthy watersheds and natural systems.
- Support citizen volunteers in their efforts to bring natural resource information to their communities.
- Educate, train, and empower stewards as community leaders and educators.

In 2005, nearly 1000 hours were logged by Stewards, reaching community members throughout King County. Time was taken this year to reflect on the 15-year tenure of the program and to look for ways to increase the impact Extension Watershed Stewards have in their communities. As part of this process, two focus groups were held in September in an effort to gather feedback from current Stewards.

As a result of the focus group meetings, some changes have been made for the 2006 training, including 1) incorporating more hands-on field skills into the training such as invasive species removal, the basics of restoration, and tree planting techniques, 2) moving the training to the fall to better accommodate field components, and 3) strengthening collaborations with other local programs and organizations to facilitate placement of volunteers in existing projects upon graduation.



Extension Watershed Stewards lead a stormwater activity by making storm sounds with youth.
Photo B. Alford



Stewards-in-training visit Shadow Lake Bog to learn about this unique wetland type.
Photo T. Zimmerman

Working relationships have been fostered and strengthened between the Extension Watershed Stewardship Program and King County Park's Park Ambassador Program, Cascade Land Conservancy, WRIA 7, 8, and 9 coordinators, EarthCorps and Friends of the Cedar River Watershed. By working closely with our partners, existing volunteers will come to the Program to increase their skills, and new Stewards will be able to easily plug into existing projects in their communities.

Success!

- Steady growth over 15-year program tenure
- Nearly 300 Extension Watershed Stewards trained
- Stewards have volunteered over 30,000 hours at a current market value of over \$500,000
- Projects have reached all areas of King County

Empowering volunteers to bring natural resource information to the public

In 2005, 9 new stewards took part in the nine-week training, which focused on connections between urban, rural, and wild landscapes King County. Highlights included:

- a day-long Cedar River Watershed Tour;
- a wetland field trip to Soos Creek and Shadow Lake Bog;
- a tour of a low impact development (LID) demonstration neighborhood in Seattle;
- a walking trip to view the Black River heron rookery; and
- presentations from local experts in many fields including volunteer management, water regulations and laws, education, project management, and numerous natural resource fields.

Again, as in past years, the stewards-in-training found the course inspirational and invaluable. Here are some of their comments about the training:



Class of 2005 Extension Watershed Stewards

Photo B. Gaolach

"I think this program is very effective for bringing in citizens with a variety of backgrounds to learn leadership methods on watershed topics. Thank you!"

"I truly enjoyed meeting the speakers who were very accessible during and after the programs. Great for networking for our upcoming projects."

"This course was excellent. I would happily take it again just to absorb more information!"

-Comments from 2005 training graduates

The Watershed Stewardship program was created to promote a stewardship ethic towards our land and water resources among rural and urban residents of King County. The first Watershed Stewardship Volunteer Training was held in 1990 and was designed to educate and provide tools to volunteers who were then able to reach out to their communities with a message of stewardship. Since that time, in addition to several short-courses and public conferences, the volunteer training has continued each year and has resulted in an ever-growing group of skilled volunteer educators promoting stewardship and providing leadership in King County.

Extension Watershed Stewards are active in their communities in a wide variety of ways. By enrolling in the program they agree to volunteer a minimum of 60 hours of their time in the year following the training course as educators and leaders spreading the word about watershed stewardship. Many volunteers go well beyond this requirement by exceeding the number of hours and adopting a life-long stewardship ethic.

For more information about the Extension Watershed Stewardship program, please visit our website at <http://www.metrokc.gov/wsu-ce/Land&Water/index.htm> , or call 206-205-3203.

Tara Zimmerman, M.S.
Extension Faculty
Water, Land, Forests, Farms, and Food
(206) 205-3203
tara.zimmerman@metrokc.gov

WSU King County Extension
919 SW Grady Way, Suite 120
Renton, WA 98055-2980
<http://www.metrokc.gov/wsu-ce>



Stewards-in-training learn about stream restoration on a field trip in Issaquah.

Photo P. Racette